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ERASTUS S. WILLCOX.

E. S. Willcox, for more than fifty years connected with the Peoria, Illinois Public Library, and for many years its librarian, died at the Proctor Hospital in that city, April 6, 1915.

On Tuesday afternoon, April 6, Mr. Willcox left his home to walk to the library, as was his custom. When he attempted to cross the street there were several automobiles going up and down, and in stepping out of the way of them, he did not notice an approaching street car, but stepped directly in front of it. Although the motorman sounded the gong and made every effort to stop his car, the fender struck Mr. Willcox and threw him heavily across the rail of the parallel track. When Mr. Willcox was picked up he was unconscious and he was at once taken in an ambulance to the Proctor Hospital, where Dr. Albert Weil attended him and found a circular fracture of the skull, and three broken ribs. He lived but two hours and a quarter from the time of the accident.

Mr. Willcox was born at Port Henry, Essex County, New York, on February 16, 1830, the son of Henry Willcox and Mary Keziah (Meacham) Willcox. They both belonged to that sturdy, substantial, sensible class common to New England and New York State.

The father was a farmer. He came west as one of the first colonists that settled on the prairie where the city of Galesburg now stands. His object in settling there was to give his children the benefit of a liberal education in the college, which under the plan of Dr. George W. Gale, was about to be established in Galesburg, now and for a long time known as Knox College.

James Willcox, grandfather of E. S. Willcox, was born in Killingworth, Connecticut. His ancestors came from Plymouth, England, about 1640. In 1773, the grandfather, being about the age of 18, removed to Bridgeport, Vermont, where

he owned a large farm on the shore of Lake Champlain, residing there until the time of his death in 1840.

He was one of the two guides to help Ethan Allen and his Green Mountain Boys across the lake at the capture of Fort Ticonderoga in 1775. His remembrance of the language of Ethan Allen at the time of his demand for the surrender of the fort was, "In the name of God's Mighty," etc., instead of the language usually attributed to him.

The great grandfather on the mother's side was Captain Meacham, commander of a company in Colonel Woodbridge's regiment. He was killed at the battle of Bunker Hill, June 17, 1775, and his name is inscribed on the bronze tablet at Winthrop Square, just below that of General Warren.

Mr. Willcox graduated in the classical department of Knox College in the class of 1851. Although reared upon the farm, his taste was not for that sort of a life, but rather for books. After graduation he taught a select school in Farmington, Illinois, for one year; then became a clerk in a bank in Peoria where he remained for one year, after which he studied and traveled in Germany, France, Italy and England, for two years with his personal friend, Professor Churchill of Knox College. He was then professor of modern languages for six years until the war of the rebellion compelled retrenchment in the college finances. He then returned to Peoria, studied law and subsequently engaged in the business of manufacturing and coal mining which he continued until 1891, when he assumed the duties of librarian of the Peoria Public Library.

Probably no man in Peoria was so actively and earnestly engaged in the establishment of the public library as Mr. Willcox. Soon after his return and settlement in Peoria he interested himself in the library as it then existed, and was one of the prime movers in the establishment of the Mercantile Library. With great persistence and sound judgment he aided in the development of the latter and subsequently, in connection with others, brought about the establishment of the Peoria Public Library, to which was transferred the personal property of the Mercantile Library Association. The new building, now known as the Public Library Building, was

largely the result of the earnest efforts of Mr. Willcox, and it will remain as a monument for years to come of his zeal and interest in the education of the people. He occupied the position of inspector of the Peoria public schools and was president of the board for two years. He was always especially interested in the subject of education, not only in the public schools, but through the influence of the public library, and has been noted through his whole career in Peoria for his devotion to this cause.

Mr. Willcox's experience as a director of the Mercantile library from 1864 demonstrated that a subscription library—the only kind of a public library known in those days, was a failure so far as reaching the masses of the people was concerned; and for the very good reason that the women and children who hungered for books did not hold the family purse strings while the men did not care particularly for books.

Mr. Willcox always favored the societies and organizations that had for their purpose the development of all that was best in the city, and gave of his time and means generously in that direction. He was the author of the State library law adopted March 7, 1872, the first comprehensive free library law in the United States, and the model of the library laws which other states have enacted since then. The proof that such a law was needed is seen in the fact that whereas the old subscription library had a membership never exceeding 300, the free public library has a membership of many thousands.

Mr. Willcox grew up under the influence of the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists. In politics he was a Republican, but believed in the independence which leads a citizen to vote for the best man.

In July, 1857, Mr. Willcox married Mary T. Hotchkiss of Peoria, the only daughter of J. P. Hotchkiss and granddaughter of General Walter Booth of Meriden, Connecticut. She died January 10, 1863, leaving two children, George M. and Mary H., now Mrs. Sisson of Flagstaff, Arizona. Mr. Willcox's second wife, whom he married June 22, 1869, survives

him. She was Mary L. Hatch of Warwick, Massachusetts, and two children were born to them, William Arthur and Harold Hatch.